

Cultural Facilities Accessibility Grant

The Public Theater Application Narrative

1. Describe the project and the specific renovations that are needed? Please describe how this project relates to previous renovation and reconstruction activities. What steps led to the recognition of need.

We are asking Maine Arts Commission to consider a grant for sound and lighting equipment totaling \$9,874 with The Public Theatre providing one half of the funds or \$4,937. The Public Theatre has carefully chosen equipment that will be used immediately in the present auditorium AND in the renovated auditorium once completed. Specifically we are requesting funding for: Sound Production and System Upgrades (\$4,245), Lighting Equipment (\$5,008), and Hearing Assistance System Expansion (\$621).

We were very fortunate to receive funding from the Maine Arts Commission in 2009 that provided funds to purchase additional lighting instruments, new dimmer packs, new house speakers, and a new Large Area Hearing Assistance System. Although our artists and audiences are already enjoying the changes that those upgrades have brought to the artistic experience at The Public Theatre, the addition of these upgrades have illuminated the obsolescence and shortcomings of other pieces of our equipment, particularly our Sound System.

Computer technology and software applications that have for years served lighting designers now bring that same flexibility to the sound process. The Public Theatre is proposing to remove the technological obstacles we currently work around and bring our sound production into the 21st century by installing a computer based sound production system. Commonly used in leading theaters, this technology will provide our sound designers a more extensive, streamlined, and flexible tool bag to produce and control sound effects and music. As a result, our audiences will receive a higher quality of sound and become more deeply immersed in the "world" of the show. The addition of a computer dedicated to sound production and control utilizing the SFX6 Software will also enable us to eliminate outdated CD players and convoluted production processes that are currently used to produce sound.

With funds granted from MAC in 2009, we were able to upgrade our house speakers. The addition of two amplifiers and an additional sound mixing board in this request will allow us to more fully utilize those speakers to provide six distinct areas of sound. We will be able to use all of the speakers at their full range, without sacrificing channels when onstage effects are needed. These onstage effects will now have an independent amplifier powering our repurposed old house speakers. The additional sound board will also ensure enough output channels to serve all of our monitoring, house sound, and hearing assistance needs. These improvements will put us on par with other professional theaters and give our audience the best possible sound experience available.

Last season, we unveiled our new Large Area Hearing Assisted Device to a very enthusiastic audience. The immediate demand surprised us, and though we are currently within ADA standards for units available, we wish to ensure that we can accommodate all patrons who request the service. During its inaugural production, with simply word-of-mouth and announcements from the stage, in one performance we distributed just over half of our available units. This confirms that in providing this technology we are meeting the needs of our audience and by acquiring another six headsets and two neck loops we feel we will be able to serve all in need well into the future.

The final part of our budget is to continue the expansion of our lighting inventory. While most light for a show comes from above and provides direct illumination of the scenery and actors, it is usually subtle and only noticeable in how it shades and colors its subjects. One of the most directly visual elements in many lighting plots is the lighting that plays on the backdrop referred to as a cyclorama, or more commonly a cyc. Often an integral part of the set design, changing the lighting on a cyc allows for quick shifts in time and location that many productions call for as well as allowing another dimension of artistic expression for each show. The ministrip lights that we are requesting will give us more flexibility in our lighting, reduce the area of the stage taken up by instruments lighting the cyc, and be a positive step forward in anticipation of certain instruments becoming not only obsolete but nonfunctional due to the discontinuation of the incandescent bulbs required for them. Additionally the cost

to rent these lights is quite prohibitive. Purchasing this equipment will be another investment in the future of our theatre ensuring that budgetary constraints don't limit our artistic vision. We have also requested two Rosco Vortex Dual Rotator Accessories. These were originally part of the 2009 Grant request but their purchase was supplanted by a larger, more immediate need for new dimmers. These are motorized gobo holders that allow the designer to set a light pattern in motion for special effects. These allow dual control of both the light level and the spin speed by using a separate dimmer to control the motor. These rotators are another example of technology that enhances an audience's experience and connection with the production by expanding the lighting designers' range of possibilities. The final parts of the lighting upgrades are the spool of cable and the connections to create the additional cabling that is needed for these new items.

2. Document how the organization is able to financially undertake this project. Who has been involved in planning for the initiative? Who will carry out the renovation or technology upgrade?

In recognition of the need to keep our facilities up to date, we budget a modest amount each season to handle small needs as they arise. Unfortunately, this does not support large, systemwide changes such as these. When opportunities such as this grant arise, we are able to meet the matching fund requirements with a combination of in-kind support, annual donations, and additional fundraising efforts. This season we were fortunate to hire an intern, Shawn Durbin, who has extensive experience with sound systems. He conducted the installation of the speakers and hearing assistance system, and presented this new technology as the best solution to our sound production issues. He has taken the leading hand in researching the options for this grant and will manage the installation of this sound equipment as well. Bart Garvey, our lighting designer and master electrician for many years manages our current inventory and makes recommendations on how best to improve our lighting system.

3. How does the initiative include or support the creation of quality arts activities? How do these upgrades fulfill the organization's role in the community?

By virtue of being an Equity theatre, we set forth a standard of acting excellence. By keeping our technical areas of sound and lighting up to date we are able to match that professional standard and provide audiences, designers, and interns with a deeper, more enriching artistic experience. By keeping our "tools" current we can attract artists of the caliber necessary to continue producing the quality product our audience has come to expect. We can expend our energy artistically instead of struggling with obsolete technology and worn out equipment. We can also best serve our interns who wish to learn as much as possible about theatre by allowing them to practice firsthand on current technology that they will find used around the country in leading theaters. Support from organizations such as Maine Arts Commission allows us to improve our facility while maintaining and expanding our affordable price structure which includes a top ticket price of only \$18.00. In fact, this season we began offering tickets to students under 18 years old to any performance for only \$5.00. Since its inception, The Public Theatre has been dedicated to developing a diverse audience base of people who by inclination, economics, proximity, or otherwise would never have the opportunity to attend a live, professional performance. Access to the arts, especially for our historically underserved community, is the cornerstone of our mission. Through a combination of smart season selection and astonishingly low ticket prices we have built a growing audience of people, many of whom are not usually found attending professional theatre.

4) How will this renovation create greater opportunities for accessibility for community members, staff and board, in an effort to provide the arts for all people?

These improvements to the sound and lighting systems will ensure that our audience enjoys the highest quality theatrical experience possible without the undue burden of traveling long distances and paying exorbitant prices. The additional six receivers for our Hearing Assistance System will help us meet current and future demand by our hearing impaired patrons allowing them to sit in the seats of their choosing and enjoy the show as it is presented without unnecessary strain or fatigue.